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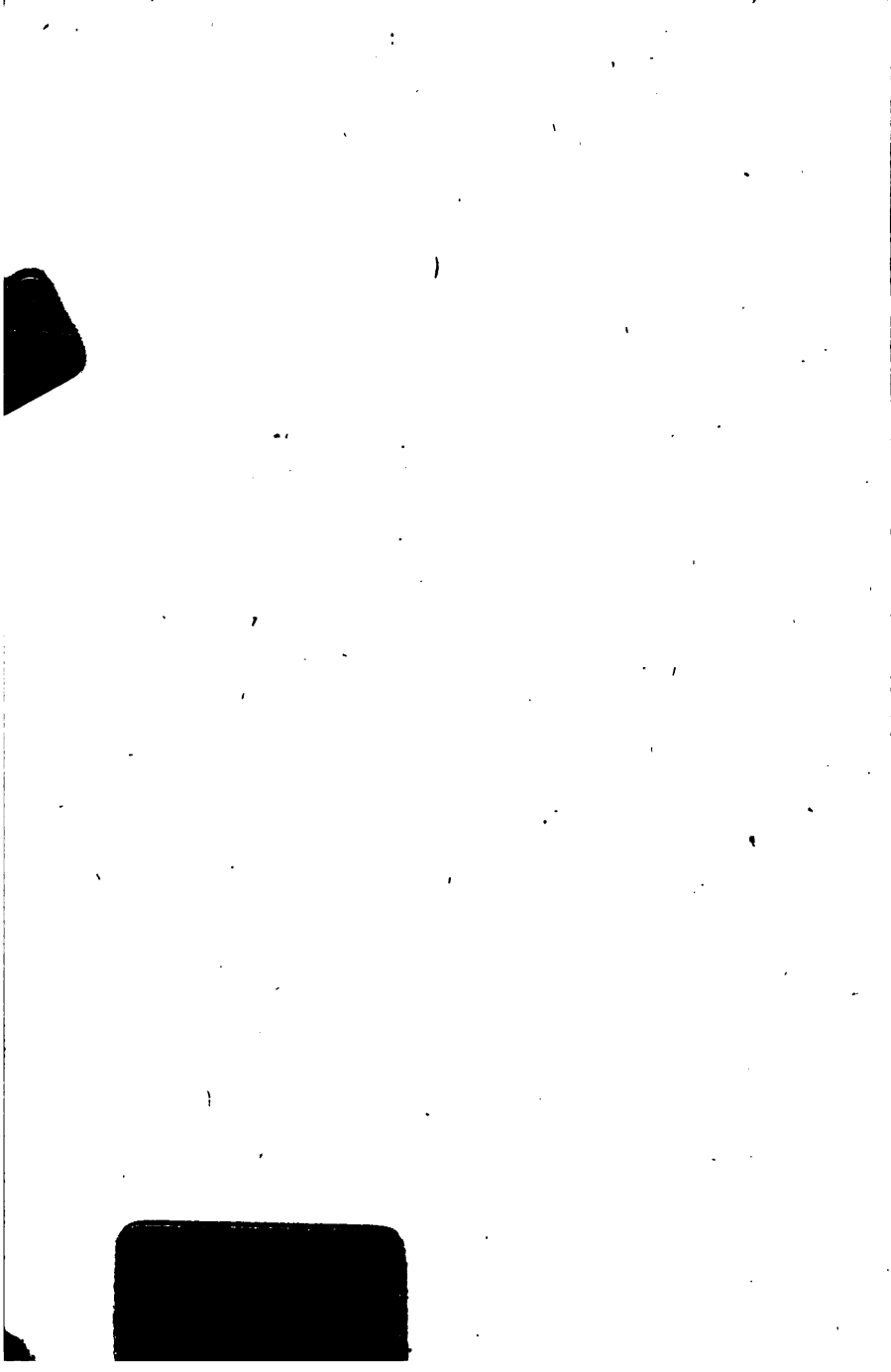
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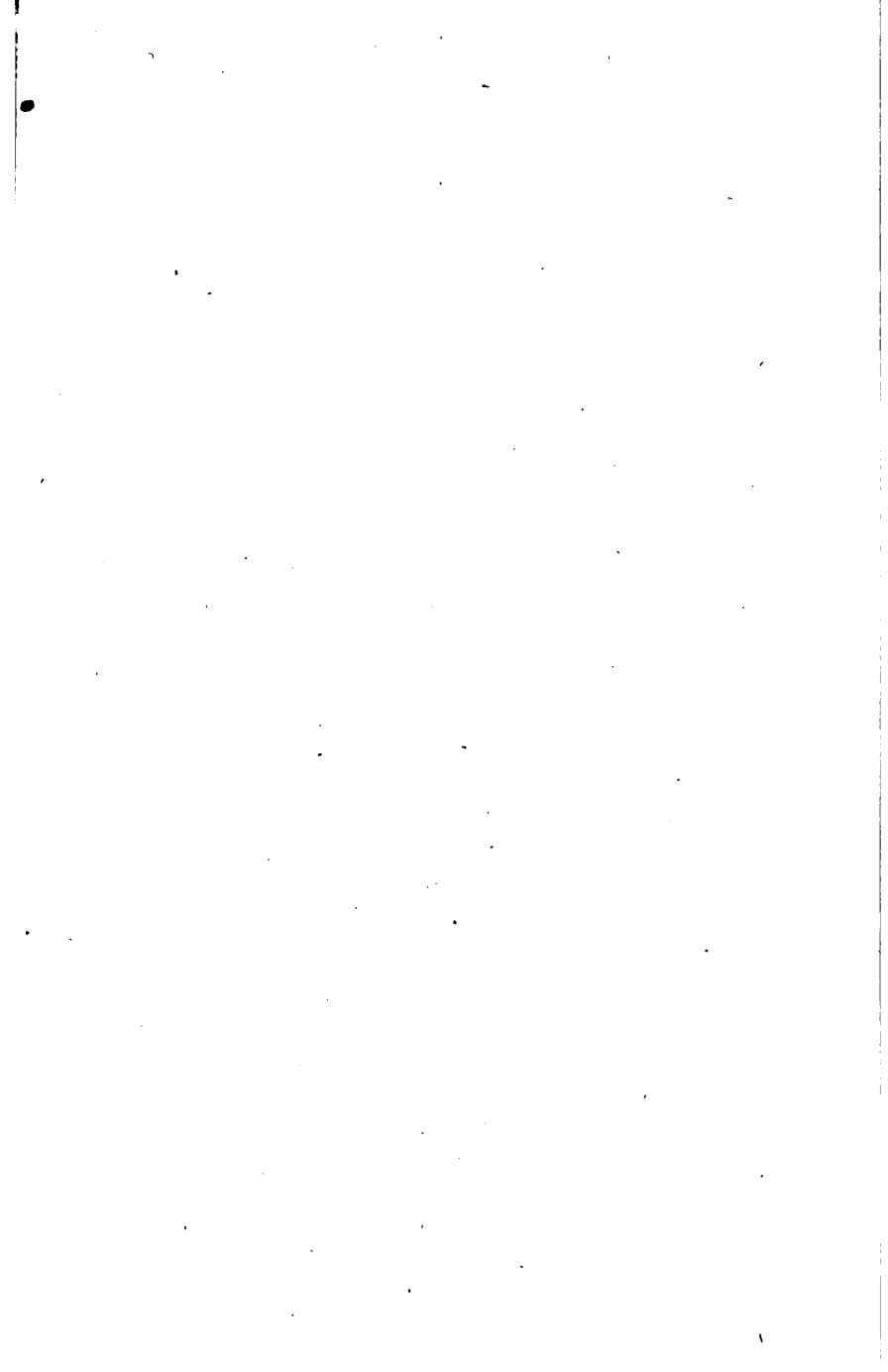
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Lamps of Fire

By *Marian Nesbitt*

Author of

**Basil's Brothers; Writ in Remembrance;
The Priest's Hiding Place; The Crown of Life,
and other stories**

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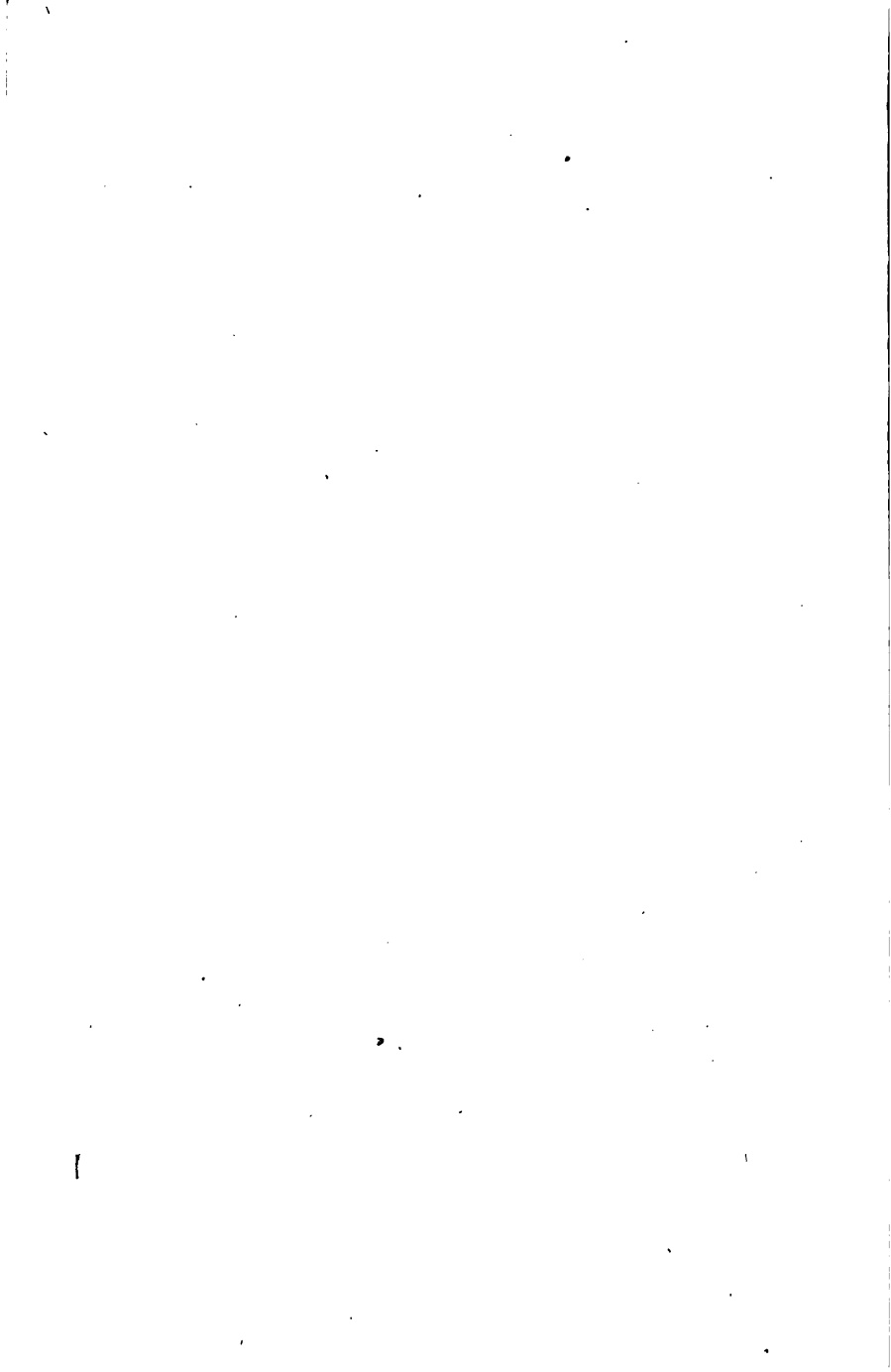
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*"Jealousy is hard as hell:
the lamps thereof are
lamps of fire and flames."*



CHAPTER I

I, MOLLY DESMOND, aged exactly eighteen years, stood leaning on the balcony of a pleasant room overlooking a small, but beautiful lake. Though my eyes were accustomed to the wide view of shimmering water, solemn mountains, and wooded park-like slopes, the scene never lost for me its singularly irresistible charm; and though, on this brilliant midsummer morning, my thoughts were busy with other things, I still felt acutely conscious of all the brightness and loveliness around. It was the fourteenth of June, and my birthday; but, save for one note, I had received no greetings, no gifts, none of those numerous letters which imagination pictured as so delightful. I was an orphan, and sufficiently alone in the world; but none

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the less did I know the bitter regret of those who can look back to a home and a happiness gone beyond recall. Both my parents had died in my earliest childhood, when I was too young either to understand or to realize the greatness of my loss. Till my fifteenth year, I had an absolutely unclouded existence. O those golden days, how sweetly their memory lingers in my heart! How sad and time-worn I sometimes feel now—how far removed from the simple, soul-reposing, glad belief in everything that was mine then! And yet, as I have just remarked, I was only eighteen.

I had been brought up in Ireland; my mother's only brother, the parish priest of a small place on the south-west coast, gladly received me into his house, notwithstanding the fact that a three-year-old child was likely to be

far from an agreeable inmate. Dear, dearest Uncle Neil! What a world of love and reverence he awoke within me. No mother could have been more tender, no brother a more delightful good comrade than he. I simply worshipped him, and fully concurred in Biddy's statement—Biddy was our housekeeper, of whom, despite her earnest desire for our welfare, we both stood a little in awe—that “his Riverence was the powerfulest preacher in the whole diocese”; and “the handsomest,” I always took care to add. Nor would I allow for a moment that he could ever have been more good to look upon—no, not even in the days when his now silver-white hair was as dark as the thick, black, upcurling lashes that fringed his clear grey eyes—eyes that reflected their owner's pure and child-like soul, and seemed posi-

tively to shine with faith in God and kindness to man.

Never, never shall I forget the awful dumb agony that wrung my heart and froze my tears before they fell, when I saw those same beloved eyes close forever in their last long sleep, and knew that he, who had been dear as even the best parents rarely are, my friend, my spiritual father, my idolized companion—had gone from me, to return no more. Like one in a dream, I bade farewell to poor, weeping Biddy and my passionately loved Irish home. My guardian, they said, had arranged for me to go abroad and complete my education.

That was three years ago. I had been in several countries and visited many places since then. Madame de St. Richard, the lady under whose charge I was placed, treated me with

unvarying kindness. I had, as she often reminded me, "numerous advantages: youth, health, ample means, good birth, and a pleasing exterior," to quote her own words; and yet my untamed spirit sighed for the soft, moist air of the land I loved best; for the happy freedom of my childhood's home; and for the selfless love that never changed and never failed. Ah, well! "God keeps a niche in heaven to hold our idols," and, as I turned to go indoors at the sound of Madame's rather shrill voice, I told myself that surely somehow and somewhere Uncle Neil was remembering me and wishing me to be glad.

"Marie, *ma chère*, I have but now received a letter from your guardian, who desires that you rejoin him almost immediately in England. *Quel bonheur pour vous! Mais pour moi!*"—

raising hands and eyebrows dramatically—"Hélas, je suis désolée!"

Madame de St. Richard was a small, vivacious person, with the courtly manners, simple dignity, and piquant charm of the highborn French woman.

"Why does Lord Rossall want me?" I asked.

"Because, *mon enfant*, he wishes you to go and live in his house now your education is complete. Madame, his mother, is an invalid, is she not?"

"I believe so," I returned indifferently, "but I really know scarcely anything about either of them, except that Lord Rossall's father was my father's greatest friend."

"Well, *chérie*, it will, without doubt, prove a charmnig home for you."

"Home!" I echoed dubiously. "Ah, no Madame, my home is in Ireland."

"*Fi donc*, Marie. You speak like a

foolish child. Lord and Lady Rossall stand now as parents in your regard; and, believe me, it would be wiser to try to be happy with them, rather than to displease them and depress yourself by vain regrets."

"But why may I not remain here with you?"

"*Tiens!* What an impossible child it is! You are grown up, *ma chère*. The time has arrived for you to take your proper place in the world. Everything is arranging itself perfectly. Your circumstances are all that is of the most desirable; yet you would stay on here in retirement. No, no, that is not to be permitted for a moment. But"—abruptly changing the subject—"where shall we spend your birthday, Marie? In the house or on the lake?"

"Oh, on the lake, please; and may we go to Grünenberg, dear Madame?"

"*Mais oui, certainement.* You wish to visit your favorite spot, *la petite chapelle sur la montagne*, once again. *Bien*, we will start immediately."

In truth, Madame enjoyed these water excursions as much as I did, though for a different reason. She liked to sit under an awning on the upper deck of a little lake steamer and read a novel; or to rest in the window of some pleasant mountain hostelry; whilst I, accompanied by my faithful Irish terrier, Rory, climbed and explored to my heart's content. I needed no other protection than my dog. It was early at present for tourists; and, in any case, Grünenberg, beautiful as it was, lay too far out of the beaten track to tempt the genus sightseer.

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On that particular afternoon, I remember, I arranged with Madame de St. Richard to rejoin her on the small wooden landing-stage at the foot of the mountain in time for the boat due at four o'clock. The moments seemed to fly as last moments invariably do. I bade a reluctant farewell to my favorite haunts—to the tiny chapel and the familiar woodland ways, and at length turned down the steep patch.

Far below, the smooth waters of the lake gleamed like silver; the air was hot and fragrant with the scent of pines; the ground was green with dainty mosses and brilliant with many flowers. I lingered, gathering first one and then another, till the unexpected sound of a steamboat bell effectually quickened my steps. I glanced at my watch; it had stopped. I believed I was early; nevertheless there was the

little steamer rapidly approaching the pier! Calling Rory, I ran with all speed to the landing-stage. Madame was not there; yet, unless my eyes strangely deceived me, I descried her trim, upright figure a few yards ahead. It crossed the gangway; a minute later I, too, had reached the deck, and we were off.

I made my way above, never dreaming that I should not see my companion comfortably established in some shady corner. What was my surprise to find no trace of her, and still worse, to discover that I had come on board the wrong boat! A feeling of dismay almost amounting to despair took possession of me. How I inwardly railed at the imbecility and absent-mindedness that had been the cause of such a catastrophe; for, knowing the light in which Madame would regard the oc-

currence, I could call it by no other name. How frantically I sought some means of escape from this provoking dilemma—yet all to no purpose. The boat sped merrily on, taking me every moment further and further from Madame, whose horrified astonishment at my non-appearance I dared not allow myself to contemplate. Little though I am addicted to tears, I could have cried with mortification and annoyance. Perhaps something of this inward perplexity must have showed itself outwardly upon my face. As a matter of fact, it must have done so; for a voice near at hand said:

“Excuse me, but are you in any difficulty?”

I started and, turning from my gloomy survey of the familiar scene, fixed my gaze on the speaker, who proved to be a young man of seven

or eight and twenty, tall, with dark brown hair, blue eyes, and a charm of voice and personality that no words can describe. Lonely and unprotected as I felt, acutely conscious also of the extreme awkwardness of my position, I was, nevertheless, seized with an irresistible desire to trust him. The courteous deference of his manner would have inspired confidence in the most timid; and what was more, Rory—to my mind an infallible judge of character — evidently regarded him with marked approval.

Second thoughts suggested that a perfect stranger is not usually made the recipient of one's confidences. But second thoughts are by no means the best—quite the reverse in my humble opinion—and I determined to abide by my first impression; for, even in those days, I had a pet theory that instinct,

intuition—call it what you will—is a far safer guide than many people would have us believe.

“I am in a terrible difficulty,” I explained impulsively, “and all through my own stupidity.” I then proceeded to explain while my companion listened in attentive silence—a silence which was far more encouraging than any number of questions or commiserating comments.

When I had finished, he said:

“Your friend, I understand, will be waiting for you at Grüenberg?”

“Yes, we were to leave there by the four o’clock boat.”

“And it is now just three. We are due at Altensee at 3:15. Why not land there and let me row you back to Grüenberg. I could do it, I think, by four o’clock.”

"Oh, but I could not dream of taking up your time and putting you to such inconvenience."

"My time is my own; and it will not cause me the slightest inconvenience; therefore, you have only to please yourself in the matter."

"You are very kind. I should be more than grateful," I began, and then paused in some embarrassment. Truth to tell, I was torn between an intense desire to give myself up to the pleasure of this, the first approach to a real adventure which had ever fallen to my lot and the fear of shocking Madame de St. Richard's rigid sense of propriety beyond all forgiveness. A whimsical smile gleamed for a moment across the seriousness of my would-be benefactor's face.

"You are afraid, perhaps. It is quite natural; but I assure you I am

used to rowing in an open boat on these mountain lakes. Otherwise, I should not have asked you."

"I am not afraid—not in the very least," I protested eagerly. The idea of danger had, in point of fact, never even entered my mind. It was the other side of the question only that presented itself—the conventional idea of the fitness of things, which ruled all Madame's actions, and which had been carefully instilled into me by her. But inclination, combined with the conviction that a refusal would be little short of an insult to the man beside me, eventually gained the day, and I turned to him in grateful assent.

A few minutes later, we reached Altensee. My companion took me to a charming old-fashioned inn by the lakeside, and in less time than I could have supposed possible, reappeared

with the intelligence that he had succeeded in obtaining a boat which was ready waiting at the end of the garden.

"Can you steer?" he asked, as we walked down the sloping path to the shore.

"Yes, but I wish you would let me help you to row."

"Indeed, I shall do nothing of the kind; you would find this very different from an English river."

"I have never been on an English river," I returned quickly; "the only river I know is an Irish one—I am Irish myself," I added with a touch of proud defiance. Why, I wondered half petulantly, did he take my nationality so entirely for granted.

"So am I—on my mother's side," my companion answered, as he arranged the cushions more comfortably for me, and then seated himself opposite.

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"Are you?" I cried with my usual impulsiveness, while the boat, responsive to the touch of a practiced oarsman, skimmed lightly over the water. "Then that accounts for it."

"For what, if I may venture to enquire?"

"Oh, for your kindness and readiness to help me, and—other things," I finished rather lamely, having remembered only just in time that it would hardly do to particularize. Otherwise, I might have added that his eyes with their delicately marked level brows, not to speak of the singular beauty and pathos of his voice, were equally characteristic of a Celt.

"So you consider kindness the special prerogative of Irishmen?"

"Well, I don't know that I meant that exactly. Still I think that, ten chances to one, if you had not been

Irish, you would have passed by, like the Levite, on the other side."

"That would have been too bad, when it requires so little effort to help you out of the difficulty."

"Ah, you make light of the matter; but I am more grateful to you than I can say."

"There is not the slightest need for gratitude, I assure you. Indeed, I am spending the afternoon in a manner far more agreeable to myself than if I had been merely endeavoring to kill time on the deck of a lake steamer."

"Do you try to kill time?" I asked. "I should never have thought it." In truth, his face bore the unmistakable stamp of strenuous thought, and its intellectuality was further confirmed by the sadness of both mouth and eyes. That sadness interested and fascinated me. Was it simply the outcome of

deep and prolonged reflection, or had some bitter heart sorrow passed and left its ineffaceable impress there?

"Well," my companion remarked after a slight pause, "may I be told why you think it is not my habit to indulge in that particular form of sport generally known as 'killing time?' "

"I think so," I returned, "because I feel sure you would always find something better to do."

He laughed, and that laugh seemed to cement the rapidly growing friendship between us. Could it be possible, I asked myself wonderingly, that scarcely more than an hour ago we had never met? I wished that the moments would not fly so fast; that the boat would go slower; or that Madame might grow tired of waiting and—most improbable contingency—

leave me to find my way home alone. In short, I desired every likely and unlikely thing that might prolong an experience so novel and so interesting.

But all too soon the familiar promontory and the richly wooded slopes of Grünenberg came in sight, and I knew that my pleasant journey was almost over.

"It is strange, is it not," my companion remarked, "to think that perhaps we two may never meet again. Our paths have crossed, and for a little while we, who a short time ago were utter strangers to each other, have talked together as friends. Now we are going to separate once more."

"Yes; but, whatever happens, nothing will ever make me forget your kindness. I have not thanked you as I ought. Still——"

"I understand," he answered, as I hesitated trying to find words less cold

and ineffectual, "you are far too grateful for a trifling service which, believe me, it has been a pleasure to perform. Well, here is Grünenberg, and there is your friend."

Yes, there was Madame, gesticulating wildly as we approached.

My companion moored the boat to an upright post at the end of the small wooden pier, and, springing out, handed me up the rather slippery steps. "Whoever he may be, he is a gentleman in the fullest acceptance of the word," I said to myself as I watched him standing bareheaded before Madame de St. Richard, explaining matters in fluent French, and with an accent not less pure than her own.

"*Mille remerciements, Monsieur,*" she responded with frigid politeness; "I am deeply indebted to you for your care of my dear young friend; you

have saved me much painful anxiety; the four o'clock boat is late to-day, and, if I mistake not, I see it even now approaching. Accept, *Monsieur*, the expression of my sincerest gratitude. Marie, *mon enfant*, we must hasten. *Monsieur*, I wish you a very good day." Passing by him with the state-liest inclination, she crossed to the other side of the pier and beckoned me to follow.

"Good-bye," I said turning to my new friend, wishing I could think of some gracious, appropriate little speech. Instead I remarked irrelevantly:

"You are not going all the way back to Altensee, surely?"

"Yes; that is my intention. Good-bye. I ought to have told you my name. It is Rex Fortescue."

"And mine," I said, "is Molly Desmond. Good-bye again, Mr. Fortescue. You have been very kind to me, and Rory and I—neither of us forget."

A few minutes later, as I stood on the deck of the steamer, I saw the little boat put off from the pier, and Rex Fortescue rowing with swift, strong strokes towards the sunset. Was he rowing out of my life forever, or were we destined by the mysterious laws of circumstance to meet again? I wondered; but wondering will not forecast the years; and no voice, no whisper stole from out the future to tell me what the coming years might bring.

CHAPTER II

TOWARDS five o'clock, on a lovely afternoon ten days later, I found myself rapidly approaching my new home. I tried to feel as unconcerned as I hoped I looked, and, as far as outward appearance went, I think I must in a measure have succeeded, for Mrs. Mears—the important elderly housekeeper from Rossall Castle—who had been sent to meet and accompany me thither, did not seem aware of my inward trepidation.

“There is the castle, Miss. You can just catch a glimpse of it between those trees,” she exclaimed, pointing up to where the sunlight fell on the towers and turrets of one of the most beautiful and stately old buildings I have ever seen. “My Lord would

have met you himself," she continued, "but he was obliged to attend a meeting at Millborough, and could not return in time; my Lady, as you know, is unable to leave her couch."

"Yes; it seems very sad."

"It *is* sad, Miss; a heavy cross for any one, and heavier still perhaps for her Ladyship, being so beautiful, though no longer young. However, it will be a comfort and a pleasure to her to have you, Miss Desmond; she has been wearying for the sight of you these past ten days."

"That is very kind of her," I said, "and I sincerely hope that you are right, and that I shall help to make her time a little less weary." But, accustomed though I was to new places and new people, my heart sank at the thought of living among strangers.

Madame de St. Richard, though she never called forth any strong attach-

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ment on my part, had yet evoked a certain amount of affectionate gratitude if only because under her roof the wheels of social life always ran smoothly—no disagreeable hitches occurred, no groans and creaks disturbed the peace of the journey. Despite her vivacity, sparkling wit, and detestation of dullness in any shape or form, she possessed a strength of will and forceful restraint of character that enabled her to rise superior to irritability and indeed to all displays of emotion, and rendered intercourse with her singularly free from jarring elements.

Already I was beginning to look back regretfully to the years spent abroad, though, at the time, they had not seemed so specially happy. The long drive came to an end at last.

I was conducted across a grand old hall, up a wonderful oak staircase, then

down a long corridor, and finally ushered into Lady Rossall's boudoir.

"Welcome, dear child," she cried cordially, holding out both hands and drawing me down beside her. "Oh, Molly—I may call you Molly, may I not?—I have been longing to see you. I want you to be happy with us and to feel this like home."

"Thank you," I answered, thinking that it would not be her fault if life at the castle was disagreeable to me. Neither the accident—she had been thrown from her horse some years before—nor the pallor of long continued pain and weakness could destroy the remarkable beauty of which Mrs. Mears had spoken; while gracious manners, interesting conversation, and a sweet voice enhanced a charm which few could withstand.

Before I had been in her presence half an hour, I had decided that, if my

guardian possessed only a tenth part of his mother's arresting fascination, I should be far from discontented at Rossall.

"Eustace can not reach home till after eight, and we do not dine until half-past," my hostess remarked when the dainty tea table had been removed and we were once more alone. "I should advise you to go and lie down for an hour, dear child; you must be tired after your long, hot journey. My maid will show you your rooms"; touching a small bell beside her. "I had them prepared in this wing, as I thought you would find it less lonely. But you can easily change if you prefer any others."

"Oh, no, thank you, dear Lady Rossall. I would much rather be near you."

In truth, I was more than satisfied—I was enraptured when I found myself

in my own quarters. A charming bedroom opened out of the prettiest and most delightfully furnished apartment imaginable—the latter went by the quaint name of the “Oak Parlor,”—and certainly it was a singularly appropriate title. The western sun streamed in at the deep oriel window, lighting up the wainscoted walls and exquisitely carved ceiling. The sound of the sea, soft and subdued like the murmur of shells, floated in through the open lattice. Flowers filled every available space, and the sight of many books made glad my heart.

The front of the castle was at the back, as we used to say in Ireland; that is, all the rooms in general use faced westward and seaward; the building having been placed on a rocky eminence that fell away sharply to the shore below. Behind, the woods

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climbed up on either side the steep winding road; the sunny gardens and widespreading park sloped gently to the south; while, on the north rose a tall, grey, lonely crag of almost mountainous height and such vast proportions that it formed a complete and most solid shelter from the strong gales which in autumn and winter sweep down and lash the Atlantic to fury, sending long rolling breakers thundering up the sides of the cliff and waking countless slumbering echoes in the deep ocean caves.

To-night, however, no hint of storm or tempest disturbed the brooding silence. Not a touch of keenness marred the pure salt air, which was soft and balmy as a midsummer breeze should be; and later on, when, dressed for dinner, I lingered a moment to enjoy the view, the scene looked sur-

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passingly fair and peaceful. It was past eight, and the sun was sinking fast. Low in the western sky it hung like a ruby goblet above the waste of waters, making the clear remote searaches almost purple in the rich crimson glow. Over cliff, too, and crag and headland, stole that strange flush; while even the white wings of the swooping gulls took on a soft roseate hue. I turned away at last and left the room with unwilling feet. From the pretty, primitive village far down in the valley below, came the sound of the curfew bell; for, in this old-world spot, the ancient custom still prevailed, and the solemn strokes ringing out from the ivy-covered church tower fell pleasantly on the evening stillness. I heard them as I walked along the corridor and began to slowly descend the wide staircase up which

—so I afterwards learnt — another Eustace Lord Rossall—had ridden his favorite war horse in days long gone by. I felt a wholly unaccountable reluctance to meet my guardian—a reluctance which, though I told myself was silly and childish in the extreme, increased and strengthened as the dreaded moment drew near.

Notwithstanding the fact that I had received an education which fulfilled every modern requirement, I was anything but modern either in mind or heart. A girl of to-day would have laughed at the idea of a guardian being an awe-inspiring person. Some would have scouted the suggestion that he possessed more than a nominal control over her actions, and ridiculed the supposition that she was in the slightest degree bound to conform to his wishes. I, however, had been brought up very

differently. In the dear old days in Ireland, Uncle Neil had imbued me with a firm respect for lawful authority, and I grew from childhood to girlhood entirely untouched by that spirit of independence which characterized the few young English companions I was allowed by Madame de St. Richard to associate with. Nevertheless, I do not believe the feeling that my guardian was, in a measure, the arbiter of my fate, had any real connection with the strange distaste I experienced at the thought of seeing him. I am inclined rather to suppose it arose from the fact that the dreaded moment had arrived.

No one was in the drawing-room. Lady Rossall, when well enough, dined with her son. But she had not yet been carried down; and I made my way through the open hall door on to the wide terrace that overhung the sea.

I had not gone far when a step sounded on the gravel and I turned to find myself face to face with my guardian. But, after all, could it be Lord Rossall? I asked myself wonderingly as my hand was grasped by a man who put all my preconceived notions of guardians to flight. The momentary doubt, however, was instantly dispelled by his word of greeting.

"We need no introduction," he said in a pleasant, rather high voice. "You are Molly, I know, and I am—your guardian. You look incredulous. Am I so different from what you expected? Yes"—smiling—"I see I have fallen short of your ideal. You pictured me grave and responsible—perhaps even whitehaired and venerable! Alas, I am none of these things, and naturally you are disappointed. You have every right to be."

"Oh, no," I hastened to reply, though, in truth, the mental sketch I had made resembled his laughing description far more closely than the living presence before me.

Tall—six feet two, to be accurate—broad-shouldered and strong with all the muscular strength of perfect health, a somewhat pale complexion, aquiline nose, red-brown eyes, and thick dark auburn hair and mustache, Lord Rosall, at seven and thirty was a striking and far from uninteresting personality. Yet, involuntarily my thoughts flew back to another face and form seen only ten days since. I know not why, but the image of Rex Fortescue rose vividly before me at that moment, and I contrasted him with my guardian distinctly to the disadvantage of the latter. The one realized my ideal to the full. The other most emphatically

did not, despite the fact that Eustace, Lord Rossall, possessed singular advantages both of person and of manner.

"I am sorry," he remarked, after a slight pause, during which his keen glance rested on me in kindly scrutiny. "I am sorry, for I see that reverence is a strongly marked feature in your character; and had I turned out in the least like the ancient and eminently worthy individual you imagined, I should have enjoyed a perfectly novel experience—as it is——"

"As it is, my dear fellow," exclaimed a voice that made us both start, "as it is, you will probably find innumerable compensations. Meanwhile, won't you make me known to your ward?"

Unconsciously I drew nearer to my guardian, over whose face, I fancied, a shade of annoyance had passed. The newcomer's tone was not intentionally

disagreeable; but the hint of sneering cynicism underlying his words displeased me even more than the aggressively pleasant manner in which they were uttered.

"Molly," Lord Rossall said, "may I introduce my friend?"

"Sir Owen Orchardson—Miss Desmond."

I bowed, declining to see Sir Owen's outstretched hand; and as I glanced at him the feeling of repugnance deepened almost to repulsion. He was rather below than above the middle height, and looked considerably over forty, though I afterwards learnt that he was about the same age as my guardian. His face was large and pale; his light hair, which grew thinly on his high forehead, was worn very long and bushy behind. His movements were awkward and wanting in

repose; and while he evidently strove after an unusual degree of refinement, to me there was something excessively unattractive—not to say repellent—in his whole personality. As he stood leaning with an abandonment of studied ease against the stone balustrade beside my guardian, the unwilling thought, that he looked like his evil genius, flashed across my mind.

“Come in, Molly,” Lord Rossall exclaimed. “Now the sun is gone, that soft silvery white affair you have thrown round your shoulders is scarcely warm enough.”

“Though eminently becoming,” Sir Owen added in his honeyed, condescending accents; while I, too surprised and indignant to retort, hurried on. When we entered the hall, I found myself alone with my guardian, who turned to me with a sudden soften-

ing of face and voice. "You have seen my mother," he said. "I do what I can, but a man is very helpless. It will be the best thing in the world for her to have a young girl here, and your companionship will do much to brighten her darkened life. Ah, my poor mother! If you could have seen her before the accident—so active, so full of keen vitality—and now she bears her weakness and suffering with such patience and fortitude. I hope you will soon learn to love her."

"I am sure I shall," I answered fervently, "she is so beautiful and so sweet."

CHAPTER III

THE next morning, my guardian proposed to take me over the castle; and much to my relief, Sir Owen Orchardson, on the plea of having important letters to write, went off to his room. Rory had already settled down in his new home, and as we stepped out into the brilliant sunshine, he, wild with delight, came racing along the terrace to meet me. From one stately room to another, from tower to turret, from library to chapel, from picture gallery to long disused dungeon, we went. It was all very historic, very interesting; and Lord Rossall made an excellent guide. I found the time go much faster than I expected. Indeed, I was quite astonished to hear twelve o'clock strike, as at length we sat down on the deep

window seat of a quaint upper chamber in the north tower, known as the "Astrologer's Room."

"Well, Molly, what do you think of my home?" my guardian asked pushing open the ivied casement and letting in a warm stream of sunny sea-scented air.

"I think it is charming," I replied. "You must be fond and proud of it."

"Yes," he said, "I am. I would rather starve her than be rich anywhere else. I love every stone of it. It has become as much a part of my life as if it were a sentient thing. You will laugh, though, if I treat you to such confidences."

"No, I certainly shall not," I exclaimed emphatically. "Because circumstances have made me a wanderer for the past three years, you imagine, perhaps, that I can not sympathize

with your attachment to your home. But I can. I know what it is to have one's heart bound up in some dear place, and then be obliged to leave it."

"Ah!" he muttered, his brows contracting suddenly, and a shadow falling on his face, "that must be bitter indeed. I had no idea you were so devoted to Ireland, Molly."

"*Devoted* is an appropriate word," I said, thinking tenderly of Uncle Neil and Biddy and the shabby old house by the "Chapel." My sympathy went out to the man beside me. I liked him for his unaffected avowal. His almost passionate attachment to his beautiful inheritance was something I could thoroughly understand and appreciate. "You are more fortunate than I," I exclaimed, "you have no cruel guardian to send you away from Rossall as I was sent from my beloved Innistowel."

"Ah, Molly, believe me, I would not have done it, had I realized for a moment what that going meant to you."

"Then you would have been wrong," I said. "You did the best and wisest and kindest thing for me. I see that plainly now. Besides, terrible as the parting was at the time, it would have been still harder later, and I could not go on living there without Uncle Neil. No, you have no cause for regret."

"But you must have thought me a heartless, tyrannical wretch."

"I was far too miserable then to think about anything or to care what became of me; and afterwards, when I went abroad—I believe it sounds dreadfully rude to say so—but I honestly believe I scarcely ever remembered your existence till Madame de St. Richard called me one morning a

fortnight ago, and told me you had written, saying I was to come to England at once."

"And are you sorry?"

"In one way—yes. I dreaded going again to live among strangers, and you and Lady Rossall were strangers to me then, though now it seems difficult to realize the fact. What a dear little quaint round room this is! Did you really have an astrologer at Rossall in days gone by?"

"I imagine so; and doubtless he sat where we are sitting at this very moment and watched the stars, foretelling future events and predicting the doom that was to fall on different members of the family. By the bye, have you heard of the Doom of Rossall? It is quite a well established tradition here."

"No, do tell me. It sounds quite medieval and exciting."

“Well, prepare yourself to be properly thrilled. It invariably falls on one of the name of Eustace.”

“But what is it?” I asked. “Something very dreadful?”

“That depends on your idea of dreadful. That fact is, so runs the story—a story which, I am bound to confess, has strangely enough proved true—that, from time immemorial, the unfortunate sons of our race called Eustace have been possessed—I use the word advisedly—with a perfect demon of jealousy. The Eustace temper has become almost proverbial; and certainly its owners must have found it anything but a comfortable heritage?”

“Then why on earth did your people give you the name?” I exclaimed involuntarily.

“Because my father himself bore it and wished to show himself superior

to the old superstition. My dear child, you look quite awe-struck; let us forget it and talk of something else."

"Oh, wait a moment, please," I said; "I am so deeply interested. I have read of such things, of course, but——" I hesitated and he went on.

"To talk to any one who lives under a sort of ban is a new experience, isn't it? And"—smiling—"you would perhaps like to hear whether your erstwhile respected guardian owns the ancestral failing. To tell you the truth, Molly, I haven't the ghost of an idea. The only son of such a mother as mine, and a widow to boot—what can I know of my own limitations. From my very birth, I have been surrounded by love and admiration. Unquestioning belief and tenderest trust have always permeated the atmosphere of my environment. My temper has never been put

to the test. How I should act, therefore, if placed in circumstances calculated to arouse the passion of jealousy I have no means of judging, seeing that, as I just now remarked, I have not once been tried."

"Oh, I hope—I do hope," I cried earnestly, "that you never will be."

"Amen to that wish," he answered, rising and closing the window.

"Where have you two been hiding yourselves all the morning?" inquired Sir Owen a few minutes later when we met at the luncheon table.

Lady Rossall was already on her couch.

"In honor of you, Molly," she said, drawing my face down to hers, "I am going to ask you to drive with me this afternoon, if you do not mind a sedate pace and a dull companion."

"To drive, my dear mother!" exclaimed her son in tones of keen satisfaction, "that is good news."

"Yes, I don't think I shall feel nervous with Molly. There will be so much to talk about. I shall forget my helplessness. Have you shown her everything, Eustace?"

"I believe so, Mother. Did I do my duty, Molly?"

"Yes, indeed," I said. "I have spent a most delightful morning."

"Ah! Miss Desmond," exclaimed Sir Owen, leaning towards me with his condescending smile, "you are still young enough to retain your enthusiasm."

"But, why need we ever outlive it?" Lady Rossall demanded. "For my part, Sir Owen, I do not admit the necessity. Let us keep our hearts green and fresh, even when we our-

selves shall have grown grey and old. Let us hold fast to our ideals, and still faster to our persistent belief in the goodness of human nature."

"Dear lady, I envy you your sweet faith, but I can not emulate it. I am a cynic, Lady Rossall, a terrible cynic, I fear; and my confidence in the worth of my fellow creatures is practically nil. Life is a hard school; and I, alas, have been cruelly disillusioned. Don't you sympathize with me, Miss Desmond?"

"No," I said, "but I pity you very much."

"Well done, Molly! There's a snub for you, Orchardson," laughed my guardian.

"I assure you I never intended it as such," I hastened to exclaim, while Sir Owen looked disconcerted, and Lady Rossall smiled.

"I really am very sorry for Sir Owen. He must lose more than half the good of life."

"That is exactly my opinion," Lady Rossall said; "if we look askance at, and indulge in a rooted distrust of all our fellow travelers on life's road, we not only alienate possible friends and delightful companions, but we condemn ourselves to perpetual loneliness, to isolation of soul and bitterness of spirit, to a narrow, hard-judging, self-centered existence, and the circumscribed, distorted outlook of those who refuse to mix genially with their kind. Believe me, Sir Owen, I speak from experience. You will find if you study it aright that—to quote the words of one of my favorite poets—'still humanity grows dearer, being learned the more.'"

"Pardon me, Lady Rossall, your poet was a woman, and naturally re-

garded the question from a highly imaginative, idealistic point of view."

"You consider, then, that women are incapable of forming sound judgments?"

"Yes; dear lady, I do. Of course, there must be exceptions to every rule, but such exceptions"—in a voice of calm superiority—"are rare, very rare."

I felt my temper rising and secretly wondered how Lady Rossall could listen with such unmoved, smiling courtesy. I had yet to learn that this almost incessant sounding of the personal note was one of Sir Owen's most irritating characteristics.

"Are you also among the decadents?" I asked my guardian.

"My dear child—no! Pessimism is not at all in my line. Indeed, why should it be, seeing that my fellow

mortals nearly always turn out better than I expect, and that I find existence an exceedingly good and desirable thing."

"So do I," I said, "on the whole."

"Forgive me, my dear Miss Desmond, you can have had so little experience," broke in Sir Owen; "you are 'a griefless girl in love with life and ignorant of love's grave.'"

"I beg your pardon," I returned. "I am by no means 'griefless' and as to being 'in love with life,' I've never found that railing at the inevitable helps one to escape the briars of this workaday world. Why don't you try to be a philosopher, Sir Owen? Philosophers are much happier than cynics. They don't expect, and consequently they are not disappointed. Besides, they know that always 'there is some soul of goodness in things evil, would men observingly distill it out.'"

"Yes," said my guardian, "but, as a matter of fact, how very few men ever do? They won't take the trouble; that is the reason Orchardson's a cynic. I've told him so more than once, and, of course, he always indignantly repudiates the suggestion. Nevertheless, the fact remains. It's simply laziness. There's no waste of brain and nerve tissue required for his sort of rôle. It's just the easiest part imaginable."

"My dear fellow, don't annihilate me," said Sir Owen with a laugh of well assumed amusement; and the subject dropped. Lady Rossall, however, referred to it again later when she and I were alone.

The carriage was winding slowly up a little hill. Away to the left, the sea lay dazzlingly bright and blue as sapphire in the hot June sun; the air was singularly still.

"You do not like Sir Owen, Molly?" she said in the low, sweet voice that had such a ring of sadness in it.

"I have not thought much about him," I answered, hesitating to give my true opinion of her son's friend. "I dare say he can be very agreeable to those who know him well. But, as a stranger, I confess I find him sufficiently puzzling. Does he ever say what he means or mean what he says? Or does he only wish to pose as an enigma, too difficult to be solved by ordinary mortals?"

"I have often wondered myself," Lady Rossall replied. "I suppose his friendship with Eustace is an illustration of the aphorism, 'extremes meet.' For certainly two more diametrically opposite characters it would be hard to find. Personally, I consider Sir Owen Orchardson a most uninteresting com-

panion, and I also intensely dislike his critical, carping views of life, though I try to believe they are partly assumed."

"But why should he be so unreal?" I asked.

"Because, my dear child, he will never allow himself to be simple. Poor fellow, pedigree is his tenderest point, and he can not forget the fact that his father rose to a position of wealth and influence entirely through his own unaided exertions. He—the old Sir Owen, I mean—came to London a penniless boy and left it a rich man, respected by all who knew him. He was a builder, I understand—or, to speak more accurately, a bricklayer—in the first instance, and he made himself what he eventually became solely by honest industry and indomitable perseverance. I should have been proud

of such a father, shouldn't you? However, his son feels different; and in consequence he is afraid to be natural, lest through that very naturalness he might betray his origin. It's the greatest mistake, of course; still we can't change our dispositions, I suppose. Why, here is Eustace! My dear, it's so hot; get in and drive home with us."

"That's exactly what I intend to do, mother mine," he answered, turning to close and lock the gate by which he had left the cool shadow of the overhanging woods before he came up to the carriage with three or four splendid dogs behind him. "What a glorious day," he continued, seating himself opposite to us; and I noticed, as he did so, that, in spite of his great height, he was never awkward or in the way. "I can see you have enjoyed your drive, mother; you look better already."

"I feel better," she said. "Where is Sir Owen?"

"Reading in the hammock under the big cedar. Muscular exertion is not much to his taste, particularly on an afternoon like this."

I enjoyed that drive immensely. Both my guardian and Lady Rossall did their utmost to make me feel at home; and, as I looked from the grey castle-crowned crag to the lovely green valley nestling cozily at its foot, I told myself that my lines had fallen in pleasant places. I little guessed—how should I?—with my eyes resting on that fair and peaceful scene—that here in this remote corner of God's earth I should be awakened to the deepest and strongest emotions the human heart can know.

CHAPTER IV

THE time sped by, and once more it was June and my birthday. I stood at the oriel window in my own room and looked at the shining summer sea, as once before I had looked across the gleaming waters of a little far-off lake.

“A year ago,” I said to myself, “only one short year! And yet——” I leant my elbows on the sill and relapsed into a reverie. With one exception, no very special events had occurred to break the pleasant monotony of my life at Rossall. During the months that were gone, my guardian and his mother had thought for me, considered me, and contributed to my happiness by every means in their power. Few girls could have enjoyed such perfect freedom combined with such tender solicitude. Lady Rossall possessed the true

mother's instinct, united to a large toleration and a rare comprehension of the dreams and enthusiasms of youth. Her beauty fascinated me, while her loveliness of mind and character compelled my admiration even more than did her physical attractiveness.

In truth, the deep love and reverence she inspired, together with the passionate pity I felt for her patient suffering life, had much to do with my engagement to her son; for I was engaged, and to no less important a person than Lord Rossall himself. Madame de St. Richard was delighted. She "had always considered me sensible, but far from worldly wise," she said when sending me her cordial felicitations. And now I had outrun her fondest expectations. She little knew that it was not worldly wisdom, but gratitude and an intense desire to

please Lady Rossall that had helped me to drift into my present position.

Sometimes I could scarcely realize the fact. It seemed so strange that my guardian who, notwithstanding his courtesy to all women, had hitherto never shown the slightest preference for any single one—it seemed almost unbelievable, I say, that he should have chosen a young, inexperienced girl like myself. That he loved me deeply and sincerely, I could not for a moment doubt. His kindness, his gentleness, his unselfish devotion were unfailing. I could not but be grateful despite the misgivings that now and again broke like warning voices across my mental peace. That day these voices were aggressively persistent in their efforts to be heard. “Why,” they asked, “did you make that solemn promise? Why did you bind yourself when all you

have to offer is, at best, merely an affectionate gratitude? Do you not fear the demon-spirit jealousy? Have you no dread of the fatal Eustace temper, which may wreck your happiness ere ever you become a wife?"

Thus the torturing questions went on till I could only bow my head on my hands and cry, "God help me! I did it for the best."

Though my attachment to my guardian was of the quiet, strictly unemotional kind, still I could honestly say that no other man's image had ever filled my mind, unless the remembrance of that never-to-be-forgotten afternoon with Rex Fortescue—a remembrance carefully concealed in the hidden chamber of my heart—could be counted to me for disloyalty.

It was a dream, I often told myself, a golden summer dream. My ideal had

gone out of my life forever, and the real, as represented by Lord Rossall, was henceforth to be my destiny. Nevertheless, the recollection of those sunny hours on the lake recurred to my memory with haunting insistence—perhaps because it was my birthday; and I turned away reluctantly at the sound of my guardian's voice at the door.

I still found it difficult to call him Eustace; for though we had been engaged more than two months, we had seen but little of each other for nearly four, owing to the fact that Lady Rossall was ordered to the South, early in the spring, and of course I went with her. My guardian only paid us flying visits at intervals. He was seldom away from home for long, being an excellent landlord and, if not a particularly intellectual man, at least a

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clever, broad-minded, and very generous one, open-handed almost to a fault, and ever ready to give his time and his means to any movement, whether social, literary, charitable, or artistic, that made for the public good.

I tried to shake off the retrospective mood which lay so heavily on me, and went out into the corridor, where I found Eustace awaiting me.

"Dearest," he said, as we went downstairs together, "I have brought you a little birthday gift. I hope you will approve my choice."

I took the small leather case, so suggestive of something lovely and precious, and opened it eagerly; for what girl under twenty does not thoroughly appreciate a beautiful present? I saw reposing on its bed of palest green satin, a shamrock brooch formed of the most perfect emeralds, set in

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diamonds that glistened like dewdrops round the dainty spray.

"How charming! How sweet! How exquisite!" I cried, not a little touched by the thoughtfulness that had prompted his selection. "Oh, Eustace, you are too good to me! You spoil me utterly. What makes you?" I asked, clasping my hands round his arm with a vague feeling of compunction. "I have never done anything to deserve so much kindness."

"It is not a question either of 'doing' or 'deserving,' Molly darling. Neither is it a question of 'kindness.' I love you for the sake of what you are, and not of what you do. Nevertheless, you deserve the best this world can give, and I trust that the years to come will bring you all that heart can desire of joy and happiness."

"Thank you, Eustace, thank you ever so much, for both your good

wishes and your lovely present," I said, little thinking, as he drew me nearer and kissed me, that those words of his would one day return painfully and vividly to my mind.

We usually breakfasted in a charming room, named doubtless after some former chatelaine of the castle, "My Lady's Tapestry Chamber." The atmosphere was fragrant with the scent of flowers, and through the open windows the air blew in warm, yet fresh, from the sea. Lady Rossall lay on her couch, not at the head of the table—that post had long been relegated to me—but at the side, and I stooped to kiss her as I passed, though already I had been to her room to receive her gifts and greetings.

"Mother," Eustace began, "I am expecting a visitor."

Not Sir Owen Orchardson, I silently hoped; for my prejudice against him

had not diminished on closer acquaintance. I also had an instinctive feeling, that, notwithstanding the warmth and apparent spontaneousness of his congratulations, he strongly disapproved his friend's engagement, and would, if he dared, have done all in his power to prevent it.

"My guest will be a welcome one, I know," Eustace proceeded, coming round to receive his cup of coffee. "Mother can't you guess? No? Well then it is none other than your beloved nephew. I will read you what he says":

"Dear Eustace:

"I am back in England, at last. How is Aunt Mildred? If you think she is well enough to have me, I should much like to spend a little time with you both. It seems long since I saw you and the dear old place. A line to my club will always find me."

"Short but sweet, isn't it mother? I was sure of your wishes in the matter, so I telegraphed at once, 'Come by all means, and as soon as you can.'"

"Quite right. I am delighted. Dear boy, what ages it seems since he went away."

"Molly," Eustace said, looking across at me with a smile in his red-brown eyes, "did you ever before meet a woman so unnatural as to prefer her nephew to her own son? Ah, mother, you may try to pass it off, but I know who is your 'ideal knight.' However, I give Molly leave to admire my cousin as much as she likes, though I confess I don't want him to take my place all round."

During the hours that followed, I thought little of the expected guest. I had heard of this cousin, it is true. I knew that he was the son of the late

Lord Rossall's twin brother, and, like Eustace, an only child. I knew also that he was the only other living representative of the family in the direct line. But he had been abroad ever since my arrival at the castle, and my interest in him was purely vicarious. It arose solely from a certain fact which came to my ears accidentally, and, I may add, unwillingly.

It happened that one afternoon, when I had been at Rossall about four months, Sir Owen Orchardson arrived unexpectedly; and, my guardian being out and Lady Rossall not well enough to leave her room, I was compelled to entertain him.

It was a wild day late in September. The sea dashed impetuously on the rocky shore below; and constant showers of wind-driven rain streamed down the windows like passionate tears.

It was impossible to go out in such weather, still more impossible, I told myself, to indulge in a long conversational duet with Sir Owen. Yet the latter alternative seemed destined to be my fate; for I could scarcely, with any pretence of courtesy, retire to my room and leave him to his own devices. Moreover, he showed very plainly that he had not the slightest intention of entertaining himself. Indeed, directly we rose from the luncheon table, as if divining my desire to escape, he said, "Will you take pity on me, Miss Desmond? I have never properly seen the picture gallery, and I should be sincerely grateful if you would act as my guide. Good heavens!" throwing back his head with one of his peculiarly awkward gestures, "what an utterly dismal place this must be in winter. I wonder Eustace is not bored to extinc-

tion. I should positively die of dullness in a week!"

"Possibly," I returned, my temper rising, as it always did, at the insufferable superiority of his tone. "But then, you see, Sir Owen, you and my guardian are very different in your tastes, and Lord Rossall has many duties and many interests to occupy his time. I can assure you he never spends an idle moment."

"He is fortunate in having such a champion," murmured Sir Owen with a smile that somehow made the words seem like a sneer; while I led the way in silence to our destination. Once there I endeavored to confine my conversation entirely to the matter in hand. By this time I knew each picture and its history by heart. But I purposely avoided any reference to the Eustace temper; and it was with far

from pleasurable feelings that I heard Sir Owen allude to it.

"Ah, that is the late Lord, I see, and an excellent likeness, too," he said, pausing before the portrait of Eustace's father. "A curious countenance and a still more curious character. He bears the look of destiny on his brow, don't you think so, Miss Desmond? For myself, I can read the 'Doom of Rossall' plainly there. As a matter of fact, he possessed the fine old family temper to a quite extraordinary extent. He might, and did, choose to ignore and despise ancient superstition. But he certainly did not belie his name, for a more jealous man never existed; and with his silent, self-contained nature it developed into a perfect monomania."

"Really? I have never spoken to my guardian of his father," I said as repressively as I could.

"My dear Miss Desmond, I fully appreciate your delicacy of feeling; but, believe me, you need have no hesitation in discussing the subject, painful though it is. All the world knows that the late lord's insane jealousy was the cause of his wife's accident and his only brother's death."

"Oh, surely not," I cried, startled out of my usual reserve by such a totally unexpected statement.

"Were you not aware of the fact? No? Well, it came about in this way: Lady Rossall was driving with her husband's brother when my lord came riding up. Something had occurred—some slight carelessness on the part of one of his grooms, or possibly an even more trivial matter—to rouse the fatal Eustace temper; and when he saw his wife and brother conversing pleasantly together, his unreasonable wrath found

vent. He ordered Lady Rossall to return home immediately; and when she hesitated, overwhelmed with surprise at the unexpected outburst, he seized the ponies' heads—they were very spirited—and a moment later, the little carriage was rocking and swaying down that steep hill behind the castle. The animals, blind with terror, had got completely beyond control. Lady Rossall and her brother-in-law were both thrown out. The latter never regained consciousness, and the former only recovered to become, what you see her—an invalid for life.”

“How awful,” I said.

“Yes; it certainly seemed a most unlooked-for piece of retribution. The brother had been a widower for many years; but there was a son, and to this son Lady Rossall devoted herself with all a mother's affection. I have never

met him, but I am told he is intelligent and clever—‘a deep thinker,’ his aunt calls him; and though, of course, she is by no means an unprejudiced judge, I should imagine he must have a certain amount of wit and superficial learning, being half an Irishman.”

“Thank you,” I returned scornfully, “you are really too large-minded; I am wholly Irish myself, and I feel deeply grateful for your high opinion of my countrymen.”

“Forgive me, Miss Desmond; I had no intention of wounding you.”

“Oh, please don’t apologize,” I said. “You did not hurt me in the very least. Why, there is my guardian,” and I hastened down the long gallery to meet him, only too glad to escape from my undesired companion. Sir Owen’s story, however, had remained firmly impressed on my memory, and it

helped to invest the expected cousin with a sort of painful interest.

As eight o'clock struck, I stood before the glass in my room thoughtfully surveying my own reflection. The long mirror showed me a slight girl, not much above middle height, dressed all in white, with masses of wavy, dark hair; a small, pale, oval face, and serious, rather sad, grey eyes. I know I have many faults, but I think I can honestly say that personal vanity is not one of them; and I wondered—while I stuck some white roses into the exquisitely wrought silver belt which had been among Lady Rossall's birthday gifts—whether the new arrival would be as much surprised as I was at his cousin's choice.

Again the day was sinking gloriously to its rest. Crimson and gold and azure blent in one harmonious whole, and over the sea rose

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“Rich cloud masses dyed the violet’s
hue,

With amber sunbeams, dropping
swiftly through.”

Yet, despite the brilliant beauty of the scene, there was a weird wildness about it, a suggestion of coming change. Even in the restless sound of the deep, as it “moaned round with many voices,” there lingered the hint of a rising storm.

I walked slowly down the corridor at the end of which was a large window also overlooking the sea. I often paused there to watch the gulls poising gracefully above the water or gleaming starlike against the gloom of a thunderous sky. To-night, however, to my surprise, I found that my place was already occupied. A young man stood leaning against the heavy mullion, con-

templating the view with appreciative eyes. Something in the pose of the figure or the carriage of the head—or perhaps both—seemed not wholly unfamiliar. My heart began to beat fast with a strange mingling of hope and fear, pleasure and regret. Involuntarily I quickened my steps, and the next moment found myself face to face with Rex Fortescue!

“Miss Desmond, you here!” he cried in tones of unfeigned surprise. Was it my fancy, or did a look of gladness spring into his eyes?

“Yes”; I said as calmly as I could, “had you not expected to see me?”

“No, indeed; Eustace and I are very bad correspondents. I have not received a line from him for months; and though, of course, I heard long since from Aunt Mildred of your arrival, somehow I never connected the Miss

Desmond, my cousin's ward, with the Miss Desmond I met at Grünenberg—or rather on the lake near Grünenberg, a year ago——”

“And I——” I said—“never dreamt for a moment that you—but——” breaking off suddenly—“how is it that you are not among the family portraits?”

“Because I have never thought it worth any artist's time or trouble to paint me,” he returned in the pleasantest tones that thrilled me with agreeable memories and vague regrets.

His face was unchanged. Its nobility and strength of purpose struck me even more forcibly than before; and I felt a sense of peace and security as I stood beside him, looking out on the familiar scene.

“Well, we have met again, after all, you see,” he said, adding half to him-

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self, "and you are engaged to my cousin. I had not heard of it till to-day, when Eustace asked me for my congratulations. I think he is a remarkably lucky fellow, Miss Desmond."

"Thank you," I answered, feeling painfully tongue-tied and ineffectual. In truth, a dumb spirit seemed to have taken possession of me, and though I hated myself for not being able to frame some more suitable reply, I could not do it. However, the gong sounded most opportunely, and we went downstairs together.

CHAPTER V

“**E**USTACE,” I said, “are you quite sure you must go?”

“Quite sure, Molly darling. What time could be better. Rex is here and will stay till I return. I can absent myself without the slightest anxiety, for I know I could not leave you and my mother in better hands.”

There was absolute trust in his tone, and as I looked up at his tall strong figure standing near me in the moonlight—we had come out to talk on the terrace—a strange feeling, half of dread and half of compunction, filled my heart.

“Stay with me,” I pleaded, clasping my hands on his arm. “Do stay, Eustace; I want you.” In truth, I did need him more than he guessed, for

during the delightful weeks that had passed since Rex Fortescue's arrival, my conscience had reproached me more than once for the keen pleasure I experienced in his society. Should not Eustace have been my first thought? Should not the man who loved me fill my mind to the exclusion of all else? I believed so, and the knowledge that such was not the case caused me many a sharp pang of remorse.

"Please stay, Eustace," I said again.

"Dearest," he answered, "I would gladly, but Orchardson asked me months ago to join him in this yachting cruise. I promised, in fact, long before I ever saw you; otherwise, you may be sure I should not have consented to any plan which would take me away from you."

"But could you not put Sir Owen off?" I asked. "I don't like him," I

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added with sudden vehemence. "I can't bear to think he will be always there trying to influence you, doing his utmost to make you look at things from his own perverted point of view!"

"My darling, are you not a little unreasonable? I hate having to refuse you; yet what can I do? Besides, it will only be for three weeks."

"Well, of course, if you must go, you must," I answered reluctantly, "all the same, I wish——"

"Yes?" he said, as I hesitated, "tell me."

But the remembrance of the celebrated Eustace temper flashed across my mind. Supposing any careless word of mine aroused that fatal spirit of jealousy, what misery for Rex, for me, for us all. I hastily drew into myself. "Oh, don't ask me," I said, "I am fanciful to-night, and one can't explain

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such feelings. Perhaps it is the fault of the moonlight, which makes everything look so fantastic. I won't be so silly to-morrow, Eustace."

The next morning he went. I had tried to keep him and failed, but not—an inward voice told me—through any want of sincerity in my efforts. The same small voice, however, whispered that failure was by no means a burden too heavy to be borne. It was not my fault that I was destined to spend three weeks in daily intercourse with Rex. Circumstances had left me no choice in the matter, and I determined to enjoy the bitter-sweet pleasure to the full. Afterwards—well, what did it matter? I alone should suffer. I alone should wear that crown of sorrow which only the remembrance of past joy can give. I alone should have to face the isolation of the years that

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burn and break, because my hand alone had raised the barrier which "shut my life from happier chance."

Yes, now it was too late; I knew how different the world might have looked for me had I never promised to marry Lord Rossall. But regrets were worse than useless. If I had been guilty of an error in judgment, duty, gratitude, affection—not to speak of honor—compelled me to abide by it. I am aware that women are not generally supposed to possess the latter quality, at least in its finer sense. However this may be, I can only say that I deemed myself absolutely bound to remain true to my word.

CHAPTER VI

THE days passed—golden days that slipped away like dreams of delight. Rex and I were nearly always together. He taught me the real meaning of the word friendship in its highest, purest, and noblest form. His greater soul unconsciously drew mine upward. His keen intellect changed my whole tone of thought. From him I learnt the beauty of self-reverence, self-knowledge, self-control; and in his presence experienced the rare happiness of perfect comprehension.

“Do you believe in predictions?” I asked him one day.

“What sort of predictions? Weather forecasts?”

“You are only pretending to misunderstand,” I said, hastily turning

the pages of an immense tome, bound in brown leather and fastened with curiously wrought brass clasps. We were in the library, Rex writing at a distant table, while I, seated in the south window, studied the old History of Rossall. "This is the sort of prediction I mean," I continued, stooping over a certain page, yellow with time, and reading aloud the following lines, dated 1428:

Gif a Eustace die to the world, men
say,
Then the Doom of Rossall schall pass
away.

"Has a Eustace ever died to the world, Rex?"

"No, and is never likely to, I should imagine. Certainly the present one won't."

"Well, hardly," I said, pushing the ancient volume aside and leaning my elbows on the sill. Sweet wafts of heliotrope stole in through the open casement, and seemed to mingle in some indefinite way with the quaint jangling old rhyme still echoing through my mind:

Gif a Eustace die to the world, men
say,

Then the Doom of Rossall schall pass
away.

But no Eustace had ever so died—
not even during the ages of faith when
men's hearts, despite lawlessness and
cruelty and bloodshed, turned more
swiftly to their God—one day glory-
ing in the pride of life, the next wear-
ing out "in alms dues and in prayer"
the somber close of their mortal career.

It was scarcely probable then that, in this hurrying twentieth century, one would be found willing, by such means, to remove the mysterious "doom" from his name and race. For a man of noble birth and many possessions, with modern views and modern ambitions, might well be pardoned if he felt that duty called him to the world rather than to the cloister.

The bees hummed drowsily in the fragrant air outside. I could hear far below, on my right, the soothing murmur of the sea.

"Molly," exclaimed my companion's voice, suddenly breaking the thread of my musings, "surely you don't allow yourself to believe those old fables? Take the Eustace temper, for instance. I grant you that in some cases it has proved true to its name. But look at my cousin, where does the jealousy come in there?"

"I don't know—I'm not certain," I said slowly.

"Then why on earth did you——?" Rex began, and then pulled himself up abruptly. "Come for a row," he said. "It's a glorious afternoon, Aunt Mildred is resting, and this warm salt breeze will blow those gloomy old superstitions out of your brain."

I ran away to put on my hat and coat, and a quarter of an hour later, our little boat was dancing merrily over the sparkling water.

"You look grave, Molly," Rex remarked after a long silence.

"I feel grave," I said. "I have undertaken a responsibility which is too heavy for me. Yet I did it for the best. Life is very complex, don't you think?"

"Sometimes," he answered; "but duty is generally simple, and that is the guide we are bound to follow."

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"Is duty so simple?" I asked. "Oh, Rex, if only it were! To me it more often appears like a will-o'-the-wisp instead of a beacon light. One tries to follow it and one finds oneself in a trackless bog of doubt and difficulty."

"Not if one keeps straight ahead. It is no use analyzing one's motives too closely. Persistent self-questioning, whether it relates to feelings or actions, is apt to induce weakness and irresolution. But though we can not always see our way clearly nor forecast the result of our most conscientious decisions, we must still hold bravely on, remembering that

'Because right is right, to follow right
Were wisdom in the scorn of consequence.'

"You are much stronger, much nobler than I," I said, thrilled by the note of

pain in his voice. "Oh, Rex, tell me—a promise once given should be kept at all costs?"

"At all costs," he repeated shortly, but he turned his face from me as he spoke.

"Eustace comes home to-morrow," I remarked irrelevantly.

"Yes, and then I must go."

"Go?" I echoed blankly. "Why?"

"Because I have been here an unconscionable time already," he answered. "I know perfectly well I could never outstay my welcome; still——"

"Oh, Rex——" I began, and then broke off suddenly.

"Molly, don't torture me," he cried, with a ring of such agony in his tone that my heart almost stopped beating. "We have got to face and bear this thing," he went on in a curi-

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ous restrained sort of way, while I sat white and silent. "For your sake—for mine, it is necessary that I should go. You must see that."

"Yes," I answered, forcing back the sob that rose in my throat, "forgive me."

"There is nothing to forgive. We must both suffer, God help us. But it's no use talking about it."

No use! Ah, the bitter inexorable-ness of it all. My spirit seemed to freeze at the thought, and the old, old question that has been echoed and re-echoed by suffering humanity from time immemorial rose in my mind. What is the good of it all? Why struggle blindly after a possibly mistaken ideal of right? Why spoil our life for a chimera? Better seize the happiness that lies within our reach, better grasp the golden fruit of the

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heart's Eden, rather than forego it for the Dead Sea apples of loyalty and honor.

I looked at the grave, sad face opposite. It was a true index of the character behind it; and its expression said more plainly than any words that Rex Fortescue would never—even 'in thought—"be less noble than himself." As I looked, my eyes were blinded with tears for

 "Duty, loved of Love
O this world's curse, beloved but hated
 —came
 Like Death between us."

I had given my word to Eustace—
I could not go back.

The boat rocked on. We two were alone with the sea and the sky. For a long time neither of us spoke; but

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at last Rex pointed to a lurid mass of clouds in the west.

"We had better be turning homeward," he said. "There is going to be a storm."

Yes, it was gathering fast. Already a long, low roll of distant thunder broke the listening silence and echoed solemnly among the caves and headlands of the rocky coast. Before many minutes had passed, the waves, lashed into sudden fury, played with our frail little craft as though it were an empty cockle shell. The wind, which only a short while ago had sounded "like a silver wire," now raced across the water in violent moaning gusts, now sobbing itself into an awestriving stillness. Ribbons of forked lightning, sometimes blue, sometimes rose color, streamed across the sky and illumined with flying flame the inky blackness rising so

rapidly behind us. The crash of the thunder, only emphasized at intervals by a sharp crackling report like the firing of a volley of musketry, became almost continuous.

I glanced at my companion's face, just distinguishable in the dimness. There was no trace of disturbance on it; and in my own heart, instead of fear, rose a sense of exaltation. I felt no dread of the contending elements. I forgot the parting, so soon to take place. I forgot the aching sting of vain regret, the bitterness of the "might have been." I only remembered that we two were alone together, face to face with death. It was a soul-stirring thought, and for the moment "grief became a solemn score of ills."

Oars seemed useless. We could but sit and await the issue. Strong cross currents swirled us hither and thither.

It appeared incredible that so small a boat should live in such a sea. Again I glanced at Rex. "We are in great danger, are we not?" I said, leaning towards him.

"Yes; do you feel afraid?"

"Afraid—with you?" I exclaimed.

"Indeed," he said, "you might well be. I reproach myself deeply for not having taken better care of you. I ought to have seen——"

"You could not. It was much more my fault than yours. We were talking and did not notice."

"It was my duty to notice. You are in my charge. If things go wrong, Molly, Eustace will have cause to hate me."

"You shall not blame yourself," I cried passionately. "Oh, Rex, I would rather die with you than——"

"You have no right to say such things to me," he interrupted almost

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angrily. "Don't you see, can't you understand how hard you are making it?"

I hid my face in my hands. I could not meet the pain in his eyes. Truly in my own selfish suffering I had scarcely measured the silent depths of his. The tide was running in very swiftly, and the boat, swept ruthlessly on by the giant breakers, was suddenly lifted high and dashed straight into one of the big hollow-sounding ocean caves wherewith the coast abounded.

A few minutes later, Rex, who had succeeded in throwing out the hook and making us fast, lifted me after him on to a rocky platform well beyond reach of the water.

"Thank God," he exclaimed, "you are safe for the present."

"The present," I repeated, as I stood beside him, rather bewildered by the

roll of the thunder and the roar of the surf pouring out of the mouth of our retreat, only to be hurled back again in blinding clouds of spray as a fresh wave rushed in, "surely we are above high water mark?"

"I don't think so," he answered. "But we can rest for a minute or two, and then I will explore."

"Rex," I began hesitatingly, after a long silence, "I want to tell you one thing. I may never have another opportunity and I should not like you to imagine that worldly motives prompted me when I consented to marry Eustace. It was wrong of me, but I just allowed myself to drift into it. He was so good to me—far too good, and dear Lady Rossall seemed to wish it, and so——"

"You need not explain, Molly, I quite understand. Indeed I know you

a great deal too well even to misjudge you."

Nearer and nearer crept the waves. Rex left me and tried to discover some outlet, but I could see he entertained slight hopes of success. I sat on with my hands clasped round my knees, forgetful of danger, dreamily recalling his words and tones. Presently I heard his voice ring out triumphantly far above. I rose and made my way towards him, and he showed me a sort of rude staircase hewn in the rock. We climbed it, he in front and I following. Up and still up we went. The way seemed endless.

"This must have been a smugglers' cave," he remarked, as we toiled on, and eventually reached a rough opening on to the moors. The storm was already rolling away to the east, and the sun shone brilliantly on the still

stormy sea. We were safe, though, looking across that waste of angry surging water, it seemed little less than a miracle.

An hour later, when footsore and weary we entered the hall of the castle, we found Sir Owen Orchardson leaning negligently against the carved chimney piece. He and Eustace had arrived rather sooner than they intended.

I could not have told why, but the sight of Sir Owen just at that particular moment caused me a vague feeling of uneasiness. He glanced from me to Rex and from Rex back again to me with a cynical smile—I inwardly termed it a sneer—upon his large face.

“I trust, Miss Desmond, that these three weeks have passed as pleasantly for you as they have for Rossall and myself,” he remarked in his aggressively cordial tones; but I merely bowed and went upstairs in silence.

CHAPTER VII

THE next evening towards ten o'clock, I was sitting by the open window in my own room, whither I had escaped early on the plea of fatigue. Lady Rossall had not been well enough to appear at dinner, and though I possessed a sufficient amount of self-control, I felt an uncomfortable conviction that Sir Owen's eyes followed me with lynx-like intentness. As soon, therefore, as coffee was brought into the drawing room, I told Eustace that I was tired and said good-night.

The air was intensely hot and wonderfully still. I leant out into the fragrant darkness, thinking, but not definitely; for the excitement of the day before had begun to tell, and I felt thoroughly weary, both in mind and in body. All at once, however, my

drowsy senses were completely aroused by voices talking below. Every word broke distinctly across the stillness. I recognized Sir Owen Orchardson's affected tones.

"My dear Eustace, how I wish I had your candid, confiding nature!"

"My dear Owen," laughed his companion, "what, in heaven's name, are you driving at? Why, this ambiguous speech and mysterious air?"

"Ah, Rossall," exclaimed the other, with a dramatic thrill in his voice, "my friend—for you are my friend—I admire your noble unsuspectingness, your unquestioning trust; but it cuts me to the heart, it fills me with righteous indignation to find your confidence so abused."

"My good fellow, please explain yourself," Eustace said a little impatiently.

"It is difficult to do so, very difficult; still, at the cost of offending, I will not

shirk an obvious duty. Have you not noticed—have you not seen, that your cousin is in love with Miss Desmond?"

"Good heavens, Orchardson, you must be mad! Rex, my more than brother! I simply won't believe it! It's all your confounded cynicism. You suspect every single person you meet and imagine the whole world unworthy of trust."

"Pardon me, Rossall, I have the greatest faith in love—first love," murmured Sir Owen with an effective touch of sentiment, "and, as a matter of fact, I see that both your cousin and Miss Desmond——"

"Take care," exclaimed Eustace, and the repressed fury of his tone might well have daunted a more courageous listener than Sir Owen.

"My dear Rossall, are you not a little unjust? You yourself demanded an explanation."

"Yes, yes, but there are some things no man can stand."

"I have made a mistake," said Sir Owen, in a pained voice. "I presumed too much on our friendship. I apologize."

"Don't be a fool, Orchardson," exclaimed Eustace with scant courtesy. "Say what you want to say and have done with it."

"But, I shall only wound and annoy you."

"Nonsense, man; I must and will get to the root of this. You have said too much or too little, and I intend to know what you mean."

"I mean simply what I just stated. No unprejudiced person could remain for one moment in doubt as to your cousin's feelings; while Miss Desmond—Rossall bear with me, I speak for your ultimate good—your ward never

loved you. Gratitude and a measure of affection there might be, but love—no.”

“It’s a lie,” thundered Eustace, “the meanest and blackest of lies!” Yet even as he spoke, my anxious ears detected a note of doubt in his voice. Already the poisoned shaft had done its work. In words he might deny, but in his heart he believed; and, the demon of jealousy once awakened, who knew when it would sleep again?

“You are not yourself, Rossall. I will leave you till calm reflection has brought you to view things in a more favorable light,” Sir Owen remarked in an irritatingly forbearing tone, and he moved away with that fine discretion which is doubtless the better part of valor when dealing with an angry and very powerful man.

I leant further out of the window and tried to see Eustace. He was look-

ing seawards; but presently he turned and walked slowly along, and I almost cried aloud at the change in his face. One so moved would be capable of anything, I told myself. He certainly ought not to be left alone, and I resolved to go to him at once; but, even while I was preparing to carry out my intention, voices again broke the silence. This time it was Rex who said, "Is that you, Eustace? Why are you prowling up and down your own terrace like a burglar?"

I did not wait to hear the answer. I dared not. Fear lent wings to my feet, and I sped along the corridor and down the staircase with only one desire in my mind—the desire to avert a quarrel. I ran out on the terrace. Rex was half sitting, half leaning on the stone balustrade, and his cousin stood beside him. They appeared to be talking

earnestly; but I was still too far off to distinguish the words when I saw Eustace raise his arm. There was an instant's awful pause, and then an agonized voice exclaimed, "Oh, my God, I have killed him!"

"Eustace," I cried, starting forward, "where is Rex? What have you done?"

"I have killed him—killed the man I loved best on earth, all through my accursed jealousy! Don't touch me, Molly, I am a murderer!"

"You will be, if you don't rouse yourself," I said, shaking him by the arm. "Make haste and show me how to get down! There is some way, I suppose. Oh, how can you," I went on in an anguish of impatience, "how can you stand there wasting time when every moment may be of vital importance?"

He pulled himself together then, and side by side we scrambled down to a

rocky ledge far below the terrace, where Rex lay motionless, unconscious, and to all appearance lifeless. I knelt beside him and laid my hand on his forehead. His eyes were closed. Would they ever open again? I wondered vaguely. In truth, I was astonished at my own calmness, though I ought to have known that in the great crises of our lives, it is seldom that either joy or grief finds vent in speech. Certainly great joy and deep grief do not.

"He is dead," Eustace groaned in an agony of remorse, "dead and mine was the hand that struck him."

"Control yourself," I said, shaking off the numbing sense of misery that possessed me. "Go back to the house, Eustace, and fetch some of the men-servants."

How long that time of waiting seemed, none but I will ever know.

Down on the rocks beneath, the sea sobbed drearily. A bat wheeled past me in the darkness. The distant chimes rang out from the church tower in the valley. At length, however, I heard the sound of approaching footsteps, and the terrible upward journey began.

"This is no place for you, Miss Desmond," whispered the old butler, who had been in service at the castle for more than thirty years. "Go on, Miss, do, and leave us to bring Master Reginald."

"No, Dawson," I said, "I would rather stay; I may be of some help."

"Well, Miss, as you please. If you can nerve yourself to do it, perhaps it would be better; for my lord seems terribly upset."

"He is," I answered hurriedly. "He saw Mr. Fortescue fall," which was the perfect truth, though I felt pain-

fully convinced that Dawson had his own private ideas on the subject—ideas that, I could not doubt, were rapidly assuming definite outlines, as Eustace's bewildered looks and strange manner made themselves every moment more apparent.

The slow sad hours of that dreadful night dragged wearily on. The local doctor came, but said he could not at present ascertain either the nature or the extent of his patient's injuries; and early the next morning Eustace telegraphed for an eminent specialist.

I shall not attempt to describe the torturing suspense of the days that followed. It is a time I can never recall without a shudder, and on which I never willingly look back. Rex's life trembled in the balance for long, and then there remained the awful possibility of complete helplessness. Eustace's

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agony of mind, his keen remorse were painful to witness. Even I, knowing all the suffering his jealousy had wrought, could not but find it in my heart to pity him. Sir Owen wisely took his departure on the morning of the accident, and for several weeks life at the castle went drearily on. At last, one evening, when Rex had been pronounced out of danger, Eustace asked me to go with him into the library after dinner.

"Dearest," he said, "I want to talk to you. It has not been fitting that I should do so before, but now—oh, Molly, it is hard to say it—how hard God alone knows—still the time has come for me to speak—I can not marry you. I dare not. From this moment you are free."

"But supposing I don't choose to be free," I answered, feeling a great pity

and tenderness rising in my heart. "Believe me, Eustace, if you are thinking of your jealousy, I am not afraid."

"Child, child, don't tempt me! How can I ever trust myself after that awful night's work—I, who but for a merciful Providence should have been a murderer. I feel the stain of blood guiltiness on my soul. It rises like a specter between me and happiness. No, no, Molly, earthly love and earthly joy are not for me. I must forego 'life's better part, man's dearer gain.' It is bitter enough to resign you, for I love you as my own soul. Yet when I think of Rex, I tell myself that no punishment could be too great. I am going away, Molly. It may be months, it may be years before we meet, or perhaps I may never look on your face again. But I want you to think of me as kindly as you can. I want you to

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believe that, despite all his faults, your guardian loved you with his whole heart."

"Eustace," I cried, "you know I believe it, and always shall. Oh, why need you go?"

"Because I dare not stay. I could not live here, seeing you day after day, and yet keep true to my resolve."

"But I could go away," I said. "Anything would be better than your leaving Lady Rossall and the home you love so well."

"You don't understand," he answered, "and I can not explain. Good-bye, Molly, darling—good-bye! I would have done my utmost to make you happy, but marriage is not for me."

He took me in his arms and kissed me very gently and tenderly. Truly, from his manner, it seemed like an eternal farewell.

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“Good-bye, Eustace,” I said tremulously, and I think I was nearer loving him at that moment than ever before.

He kissed me again, and then turned suddenly away. “My God,” he exclaimed in a broken voice, “this is the bitterness of death,” and he went out and shut the door.

CHAPTER VIII

WHAT passed between Lady Rossall and her son, I never knew. Dearly as I loved her, intimate as we were, it was not a subject I could speak of even in our most confidential moments. But I noticed that she endured his absence with the calm fortitude she brought to bear on her own great physical sufferings. Her days were mostly spent in her nephew's sick room; and, as under careful treatment, his strength and vigor returned, her own health visibly improved, and the dark cloud which had brooded so long over Rossall rolled slowly, but surely, away.

"Yes—her son was still abroad. He had become quite a wanderer," she told inquiring acquaintances with her sweet,

somewhat baffling smile and the quiet dignity that, despite all her gracious courtesy, proved an effectual barrier against idle curiosity.

One morning, however, late in the spring about eight months after Eustace's departure, she sent for me to her room. Rex was no longer at the castle, having gone, as soon as he was well enough to be moved, to some foreign health resort, in order, so the specialist said, to make assurance doubly sure, and complete the cure which already appeared an accomplished fact. The cousins had been together—were together then, I understood—and I hurried to obey Lady Rossall's summons, wondering much what news she had to impart. Little did I suspect the nature of her intelligence. In truth, I should have guessed any and every thing, rather than the piece of information I actually received.

"Sit down, dear child," she began, drawing me into a low chair beside her couch. "Molly, I sent for you, because I have heard from Eustace." She paused. Her beautiful face was still paler than its wont; and I felt sure I could detect traces of recent tears—those tears that are so rare and painful to a self-controlled nature like hers. Nevertheless, in her pathetic eyes and sad sweet smile, shone a look of renunciation—even of exaltation, that lent her the appearance of one who has just passed triumphantly through some trying ordeal. "Yes, I have heard from Eustace," she resumed, laying her hand caressingly on my head as it rested against the side of her couch. "His letter contains strange news, terrible news, you will say perhaps, for a mother to receive, and yet—Molly, he wishes me to tell you that he has gone to La Trappe!"

"Gone to La Trappe!" I echoed half to myself. "Oh, Lady Rossall, surely, surely not!"

"My dear, I am afraid it is rather a shock to you. For myself, I have gradually grown accustomed to the thought. Bitter and cruel though it seemed at first, I have had to do so. But I would have let you know sooner, only Eustace did not wish it, till everything was settled and all arrangements made. He has been there many weeks now. Rex, you understand, is his successor."

I sat in astonished silence for a moment, almost wondering if my ears had not deceived me. It appeared so incredible. Truly, it is the unexpected which always happens, I thought, and then unconsciously I began to repeat the old rime:

Gif a Eustace die to the world, men
say,
Then the Doom of Rossall schall pass
away.

“What an immense sacrifice,” I exclaimed aloud, “and what a noble one!” Yes, verily, it was no light thing for a man of Lord Rossall’s age and character, to say nothing of wealth and worldly position; and I could not but remember how deeply, how passionately he loved his birthplace and the beautiful inheritance he would never see again.

“Rex will return almost immediately,” Lady Rossall said, after we had discussed the subject from every conceivable point of view. “He is quite well—quite. Oh, Molly, when I think of what might have been, there is no room in my heart for anything but

gratitude. Thank God, my poor Eustace was spared the unspeakable bitterness of a life-long remorse. Self-reproach he may have for his violent temper and rash act. But at least he will not fathom those inner deeps of misery which, with his temperament, would have driven him well-nigh to despair."

"How good you are," I exclaimed involuntarily, "and it is *your* sacrifice as well!"

"Yes," she answered, "it is the mother's lot, Molly dearest, to love and then—to lose! I must be content to let my beloved go, and yet—oh, Eustace, my son, my son!"

Several days later, I was walking along the terrace when a well-known step behind me sent the color to my cheeks and a thrill of joy to my heart. I turned, as I had turned that June

evening nearly two years ago, and found now, not Eustace, but Rex by my side.

"At last," he said taking my hands in his, "are you glad to see me, Molly?"

"Need you ask?" I answered. In truth, my happiness was almost too deep for words. He was, as Lady Rossall had assured me, quite well—no trace of weakness, nothing to remind me of that terrible night when I saw him lying, like one dead, upon the rocks below.

For long we paced up and down, but what we said I can not write here, though it will be forever treasured in my memory.

"We ought to go to Lady Rossall," I said reluctantly at last, "it is past five, and we must have been talking for more than an hour; yet it seems only a moment."

"Is that intended for a compliment, Molly? It sounds like one."

"Well, it isn't, it's just the simple truth. Oh, Rex, it seems almost selfish to be so glad when poor Eustace—"

"Ah, that reminds me, I have a letter he wished me to give you. Won't you open it now?"

"Yes," I answered, feeling a little ache of pity as I saw the familiar writing. Then standing there with Rex beside me, and the warmth and brightness of a great joy shining round me, I read the farewell words of the man who had voluntarily resigned every earthly happiness for conscience sake:

"My Dear Molly:

"Rex will give you this when he sees you, as he hopes to do in the course of

the next few days. I am well, and all my hours are fully occupied. Be happy, Molly, and think of me without regret; for I have found—not happiness, perhaps, but peace. Wear the little shamrock brooch sometimes for my sake, and remember that I wish you now, as I wished you then, all the good things your heart can desire. Rex will do far more for my people than I have ever done; and you will help him, will you not? I shall like to think of you both in the old home. Take care of mother and comfort her; but I know you will. I see clearly now that I was unfit for life in the world. My wretched temper would have spoilt everything and brought misery unspeakable on those around me. Nevertheless, I loved you truly. I shall love you always here and hereafter, if God wills; for ‘love is strong as death.’ But you

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must not grieve for me. My heart will find rest and a measure of that joy which only expiation can bring. No, I repeat, you must not grieve. I am better here where my passion is less likely to be roused—far better, for I have learnt to my cost that ‘jealousy is hard as hell’ and ‘the lamps thereof are lamps of fire and flame.’ ”

THE END

